Chesterfield; A Personality and Letter Writer of the Eighteenth Century

by

Maurice Thomas Sullivan Jr.

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Thesis

CHESTERFIELD; A PERSONALITY AND LETTER WRITER OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

by

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(A.B., Boston University, 1942)
submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

1943

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Body of the Thesis:

I Chesterfield as a Personality of the Eighteenth Century; pp. 1-21:

A. Family background; (pp. 1,2)

B. Early tendencies; (p. 3)

C. Education; (pp. 3,4,)

D. Continental tour; (pp. 4,16)

E. Political career; (pp. 5,11,12,)

F. Social prominence;

G. Appearance and characteristics; (p. 6)

H. Court life; (pp. 7,8,12-14,20,)

I. Ambassador to Hague; (p. 9)

J. Experiences in Parliament; (pp. 10, 13-15, 20)

K. Marriage; (p. 11)

L. As Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland; (pp. 17-20)

M. As Secretary of State; (p. 20)

II Discussion of Chesterfield's Letters to his Son; (pp.22-31) Analysis and criticism:

A. Purpose of the letters; (pp. 23, 30)

B. Philosophy of the writer;

C. Character and methods of the writers (pg. 30,)

D. Social and moral philosophy; (pp. 25,26,29,)

E. Style of the letters; (pp. 27,30)

F. Johnson's Criticism; (pg. 28,)

G. Apparent effect of the letters (pg. 31,)

III Chesterfield's Educational Philosophy; (pp. 32-44)
Background and motivation

A. Basic philosophy; (pp. 34-36)

B. Discussion and criticism; (pp. 36-40)

C. Influence on private education; (pp. 40-44)

IV Discussion of Purpose and Effect of Letters to His Son; (pg. 45)

A. Philosophy and purpose; (pp. 45, 46)

B. Illustration of validity of Chesterfield's utilitarianism; (pp. 46-50,)

V Chesterfield As A Letter Writer: (pp. 51-70)

A. His contribution to the field;

B. Significance of letters to his son;

C. Selections from the letters revealing his true wisdom and real motives;

D. Types of criticism of Chesterfield; (pg. 69)

VI A General View of Chesterfield's Contemporaries:

A. Horace Walpole; (pg. 71)

B. Lady Mary Montagu; (pg. 75)

C. Oliver Goldsmith; (pg. 78)

D. Samuel Richardson; (pg. 79)

E. Frances Burney; (pg. 80)

F. Importance of minor writers; (pp. 80-81)

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Introduction:

The purpose of the thesis, Chesterfield; A Personality And Letter Writer Of The Eighteenth Century, has been to consider with open mind the Earl of Chesterfield as a personality, philosopher, courtier, politician, and letter writer with a view toward discovering in his activities and letters the justification of a more worthy opinion of Chesterfield than is commonly entertained by those ignorant of his merit through want of information or undue attention to his destructive critics.

Body of Thesis:

CHESTERFIELD: A PERSONALITY AND LETTER WRITER OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY:

I Chesterfield as a Personality of the Eighteenth Century

A descendant of a royalist family and by inheritance closely associated with court life and preference, the fourth Earl of Chesterfield, Philip Dormer Stanhope (1694-1773) was in his day recognized as of eminent accomplishment in an era of diplomatists and courtiers, orators and men of letters. Everywhere acclaimed for his politeness and attention to manners Chesterfield was a paragon of refinement, the outward evidence, then as now, of a man of culture and intellect. Chesterfield, perhaps, would have himself remembered and revered today for his more spectacular accomplishments; ironically, however, it is not for those gifts that we remember him but rather for a collection of letters never intended for publication. It is as a letter writer and personality of the eighteenth century that this brilliant orator, spectacular beau, and gifted politician penetrates to posterity. Not the elaborate ardor of the courtier or the vain finesse of the nobleman or even the service of the statesman to which enthusiasms Chesterfield did full justice but the simple sincerity of the man with candid truth as its adornment has preserved him in memory. As Chesterfield might express it, he has captured our hearts to which our judgments are servile; and consequently he has mastered our understandings.

Neglected by his father who seems to have assumed an aversion to him, he was entrusted to the understanding and intelligent kindness of his grandmother, the Marchioness of Halifax, who supervised the early education of her deceased daughter's child. It is to the Savile family on the maternal side, therefore, rather than to the Stanhopes that we may attribute his temperament and the formation of his tastes and mannerisms and those basic inclinations amid the diversities of social pleasure and political propriety which guided him in a course of fame. Ernst tells us* that Lord Galway, observing in Chesterfield a propensity for both politics and pleasure, impressed upon him the necessity of regular habits and systematic routine so as to afford himself ample time both for leisure and his duties as a man of the world and an occupant of responsible positions to which he should be heir because of his rank, fortune, and talents. Chesterfield later wrote that he never forgot the advice. It was perhaps for him a commencement of that life-long attention to detail and exactness which became one of his characteristics. In one of his letters to his son he expresses the delightful casuistry that rising early each morning even during periods of dissipation in highly beneficial in that it so aggravates the natural want of sleep as to oblige the keeping of more regular hours.

* "Beaux and Belles of England" Chesterfield; v.I; p.19-Ernst

Chesterfield demonstrated an early propensity toward study. He did not want the spirit of emulation and competition so often lacking in those who are educated privately. At Cambridge, where he entered at the age of eighteen, he continued his study of Latin and Greek and renewed his interest in study by the pursuit of civil law, philosophy, history, and mathematics. His interest, judging from his letters, sustained itself in the further knowledge throughout life of law and principles of government. Corresponding in French, a language natural to him for its nicety and refinement, he tells his schoolmaster, M. Journeau --- "pour l'anatomie, je ne la pourrai point apprendre."[*1] But even to studies which do not excite interest, he maintains, attention should be given so as to avoid total ignorance of any subject. Scholastic versatility is not possible without a considerable expenditure of effort and time. According to Maty whose "Memoirs" constitute an inadequate biography of the Earl, Bishop Chenevix reported that at Cambridge Chesterfield devoted the bulk of his time to study with particular regard for the classics and ancient writers. At that time he adopted, according to his own admission,[*2] the habit of quoting various classical authors in his thought and expression and aping the Romans in manner and address. Such absolute pedantry was juvenile, of course,

*1 A M. Journeau; August 22, 1712
*2 see above

and fortunately of temporary nature. Though the young student unavoidably derived great benefit from the study of Horace, the enjoyment of Martial, and the imitation of Ovid, he later learned to appreciate both ancient and modern writers, the former as the standard bearers and preservers of tradition, the latter as the trail-blazers and innovators of the future.

After college Chesterfield took the customary "grand tour" or continental excursion, a finishing educational experience then considered profitable and fashionable for the sons of the nobility. At the Hague his most noteworthy acquirement seems to have been the habit of gaming which was the fashion of the upper crust. Turin, Venice, and Rome were also on the scheduled itinerary, but the death of Queen Anne hastened his return to England. At the time he seems to have renewed his faith in the English and to have lessened his fondness for foreign influences. We have said he was of a royalist family; while he did not always admire the king he was a staunch supporter of the throne against Pretender and Pope alike. Like many a true born Englishman he remembered the ignominious confession of Charles II.

During his travels abroad he continued to devote his time to study and oratory. As a result both of his studies and of his natural genius Chesterfield became preëminent as a speaker. We have no less authority for this than Horace Walpole, who having heard the most feted orators of the day declared that the finest speech he ever heard was one from Chesterfield.

In this connection it is amusing to recall the young lord's first speech in Commons in which, though under-age, he defended the articles of impeachment against the Duke of Ormond. Not only the candor of his remarks but his immature status gave his venture a mark of impertinence which although indulged by the House did not escape the private censure of the opposition. The fear of exposure, a fine, and possible discredit to his own party forced him to omit his vote and quit the House. Thus the Earl made his debut.

As a political figure his chief merit was undoubtedly his honor which he never betrayed by allowing himself to be prevailed upon or bought over on any issue, an exclusive virtue. His political career might have been far more spectacular than it proved to be but for this virtue; but his sense of justice and allegiance to truth alienated those in power as in his opposition to the money bill of George Ist just as it won for him the gratitude of those exploited by authority as in his reasonable treatment of the Irish situation. Nevertheless, in his social experiences Chesterfield is known to have sacrificed himself in a less noble enterprise, the gratification of his vanity. He seems always to have entertained a certain aversion to English society as such. Though his manner, wit, and conversation distinguished him as a brilliant court personage he was nevertheless feared, for he spared no one from indecorous exposure to his imprudent though clever satire. It proved expensive both in the loss of friends and

of preferment.* His chief inspiration in his youth was the knowledge that he was an aristocrat in an intellectual as well as a social sphere. Consequently he became highly objective in his attitude in part, no doubt, from the satiety of experience. This same intellectual objectivity which led him to examine his fellow men as the scientist inspects his specimens or the hunter his trophies, he later came to despise and as we are later to discover attributed to an excessive pedantry. He had ample reason to regret his impertinences. In one of his letters to his son he cautions the younger Stanhope against committing an act of ridicule or insult which might lead to loss of favor or occasion ill feeling. On one occasion Chesterfield himself was mimicked in Parliament and never forgave the affront.

His appearance was a bit incongruous --- an over-sized head with large, aquiline nose, receding forehead, and dark, piercing eyes in company with an under-sized body and short stature --- and required no inordinate imagination of his beholders to appear ridiculous. His appearance might well have seemed so but for the Earl's noteworthy power of fascinating his hearers. We have so far a general sense impression of Lord Chesterfield, a younger and less mature

* Chesterfield insulted the Princess of Wales, formerly his patron because of his opposition to George I, and was never able to ameliorate her antagonism when she became Queen. Craig; pg. 81; "Life of Lord Chesterfield"

Chesterfield who gives us but a hint of the potentialities justified in his revealing and personal correspondence to his son.

His religious views following his college experiences were in general orthodox by tradition, with that inescapable deference to the political welfare of England and as a corollary of English religious philosophy, a corollary or bill of rights subsidiary to the main constitution and in effect a guarantee and protection against foreign influence in general and the Papacy in particular. But his personal attachment to a definite sect is not abundantly evident. He despairs of atheists and agnostics as being fools; on the other hand he abstains from the customary harangues of the free-thinker. On the surface at least, insofar as his morality was concerned with the honor of position, respectability, or his word, it appears to have been tolerable if not above question, and in accord with the legalities and social observances of the day. This may be a weak but not improbable hint that he did not reject the Christian philosophy however much he may have doubted the ascendency of a particular sect.

Chesterfield was as enthusiastic as he was precocious. Anxious to make a name for himself in Parliament that he might assume a figure of greater consequence in the land than that afforded by his office, gentleman of the bedchamber to the Prince of Wales. Perhaps it was the mimicking incident to which we have referred or a distaste for voicing approval

of measures to which he could not wholeheartedly subscribe that caused Chesterfield to remain silent for the most part while in Commons. The death of his father in 1726 entered him into the Upper House. But even there his progress was retarded. He did not get along too well at court; the king disliked gambling courtiers. George I, moreover, was not admired by Chesterfield, who thought the monarch unfit and incapable. His experience at the latter's court undoubtedly formed his lifelong opinion of kings as being somewhat less than men. George's Hanoverian temperament and slothful conduct lacked the nicety and tone which Chesterfield admired; his indelicate tastes and unfortunate choice of associates were insulting to a man of Chesterfield's parts and intelligence. Either from jealousy aggravated by Chesterfield's enmity toward him or for some more commendable reason famous Sir Robert Walpole, the Minister, disliked Chesterfield and feared his continued annoyance. The enmity of the king kept him out of favor, and on the accession of George II, to whom the Earl had been loyal as Prince of Wales, the Minister annulled the opportunity of any benefit Stanhope might have received. These difficulties together with the dissatisfaction of inactivity prevailed upon him to accept the Embassy at the Hague. Though it was Walpole's way of getting rid of him Chesterfield looked forward to the appointment in anticipation of surrounding himself with the most distinguished people of Europe as the occupant of an important diplomatic

office. The anticipation was heightened by the prospect of Chesterfield's almost certain eligibility for the French Embassy, in which a vacancy was expected in the near future.

It was of course a considerable undertaking for a young man, but when he assumed the position in 1728 he took care to surround himself with competent assistants. He became famous for his application to his duties, which incidentally was not so assiduous that it did not afford him his customary devotion to pleasure and his habitual indulgence in gaming. The bulk of his time in these pursuits was occupied by a mutual attempt by Chesterfield and his constituents to please each other. But one gets the impression that Chesterfield was like a matron at a masquerade --- stifled by the company and tortured by her stays, and breathless to be gone. But his longing, we suspect, was for the pleasures of London. Though successful as a diplomat Chesterfield endangered his chances for future preferment on that account by encouraging opposition to Walpole in Parliament, and he could consider himself fortunate to receive the Blue Ribband and his installation as a Knight of the Garter.

In 1732 Lord Chesterfield was recalled from the Hague by his own request. It was supposedly because of ill health that he returned to England and there was cured of a leg ailment by Dr. Palmer, surgeon of St. Thomas's Hospital. But in view of his opposition to the ministry in power it is possible that his recall by the Crown may have had a political motive.

Circumstances were propitious, nevertheless, for Chesterfield to effect a brilliant return to his first love, Parliament. Walpole had discovered that Chesterfield was not an intentional participant in the Townshend scheme to set up a rival for the Ministry. He already knew of the Earl's merit and undoubtedly thought of him as a potential supporter. Once again, however, Chesterfield proved unobsequious and incalculable as ever. When Walpole brought forth his excise scheme designed to eliminate fraudulent practices in the revenue system Chesterfield opposed him. Such an act on the part of a man who understood the value of a like measure could not be considered except as a malicious one. It cost Chesterfield all hope of preferment at the moment.

This incident is particularly important, for it explains why Chesterfield did not achieve the political prominence to which his rank and abilities customarily should have entitled him. He was not a man who could easily or willingly subordinate his will to another; he was more the type to lead and command rather than follow and execute the commands of others. He would bow to no one in matters of political conscience, and so his career is a fluctuating one in which his successes are momentary and not permanent. This open break with the ministry, which amounted to a defiance of the Crown, resulted in his dismissal from the position of Lord Steward which he had received upon his exoneration in the Townshend affair. But it was not the last of his attacks

upon the ministry. Chesterfield continued to lead an open warfare against Walpole, whose position had been greatly strengthened and whose prestige had been accelerated by the dismissal of Stanhope and other members of the Opposition. As a climax to these events the current session of Parliament concluded with an address by the King directed toward those who had sought to arouse the people by injustice and falsehood. There could be no doubt either of the intended direction of the royal volley or of the intensity of the royal displeasure.

The miscarriages and bad judgments of his political career are the more incongruous in the light of his Lordship's avowed protestation of the necessity of bending to the will of one's potential benefactors. While his marriage in 1720 to Melosina de Schoulenbourg, the Duchess of Kendall's daughter* and a favorite of the king obviously enhanced neither his position at court or his political aspirations. The king, aware of young Stanhope's extravagance, opposed the marriage. Upon his dismissal from court, however, the ceremony took place: it was not a romantic attachment but more an arrangement by which both were to benefit by wealth, prestige, and companionship. This last benefit did not materialize, however, as they are reported by Walpole

* Nominally she was the niece of the Duchess of Kendall; she was later created Baroness of Aldborough and Countess of Walsingham in 1722.
Ernst, vol.I, pg. 87

and other contemporaries as having maintained separate establishments. Chesterfield did not share his wife's peculiar cultural tastes, her love of music, or her prudent economy. He made use of the union to further annoy the King by frequenting the court of the Prince of Wales, who was not on good terms with his royal parents. With the support of the Opposition party group Chesterfield had become an unofficial political leader; with the patronage of the Prince and Princess he discovered himself again prominent in the social world.

At this time the King introduced in Parliament a bill providing for the increase of the size of the army. This step was to be taken to safeguard England in a period of Continental unrest, but it was sincerely suspected by Chesterfield and other military isolationists as a move to strengthen the ministry, and to perhaps facilitate its schemes. Chesterfield's attitude was probably unreasonable and his resentment of the autocratic whims of both King and Minister was undoubtedly a challenge to the accepted tradition; in effect, moreover, he completed the breach between himself and the King and topped it off in a culminating insult by contributing to the Opposition-sponsored "Fog's Journal" a Swiftian satire, which, however unliterary, fancifully ridiculed the delusions of his royal master. The King's wrath was inexorable. He may well have been the model for perceptive Chesterfield's frequent remark as to the foolhardiness

of committing an insult which may be overlooked but never forgiven or forgotten. That the King did not forget the incident is illustrated in his sarcastic commentary on Bolingbroke.

> "He is a scoundrel, but he is a scoundrel of a higher class than Chesterfield. Chesterfield is a little tea-table scoundrel; that tells little womanish lies to make quarrels in families; and tries to make women lose their reputations, and make their husbands beat them, without any object but to give himself airs." *

Although Chesterfield had offended their royal highnesses more for resentment of Walpole than for personal animosity and because of the inadvertencies occasioned by his strict pride and conscience, nevertheless, he found himself in good company among the Opposition. He admired Lord Bolingbroke. In a letter to his son on March 18, 1751 *2 he writes, "I would much rather that you had Bolingbroke's style and eloquence in speaking and writing than all the learning of the Academy of Sciences, the Royal Society, and the two universities united." A recommendation to his son to imitate the man illustrates the high opinion in which he was held by the Earl. Swift, Arbutnot, and Glover were among the popular writers against the Ministry. And Walpole allowed the error of aiding his critics by trying to put through a censorship bill. Such a threat was made to order for Chesterfield as the proponent of freedom of the press which he considered essential

* W.H. Craig, pg. 156

*2 "Letters to His Son", Leigh, vol.I, pg. 395

to the perfection of art and literature. He made the most of the situation. Opposition to the proposed bill was a vehicle worthy of his talents. Though in what his admirers have termed a "Demosthenic" speech he pleased the ears of his audience, he did not penetrate their understanding or control their judgment. His formula for persuasion may not have worked but the speech made him famous as an orator.

If he had been more inclined toward action, more concerned with acquiring power, and more clever in promulgating his personal designs he might have become a great political figure. As it happened he was engrossed by living down the excesses and extravagances of his youth and in defending his pride and sense of propriety. Even in death the alternate beneficence and animosity of the Georges haunted him. By the terms of the will of George I Chesterfield was to have prospered handsomely. His wife had been named a beneficiary. But the document was withdrawn by the royal heir and supposedly destroyed. In the royal family difficulties involving the allowance of the Prince of Wales and the dispute with his parents it was Chesterfield who was summoned as advisor to the Prince. When the Prince and Princess, by this time the avowed champions of the Opposition, were dismissed Chesterfield along with Pulteney and Carteret retired quite strategically to Bath. Upon the death of Queen Caroline and Walpole's consequent loss of prestige, the Prince and Princess also took up residence at Bath surrounded by their

reorganized supporters.

An opportune incident which served to discredit the patriotism of Walpole's ministry was the appearance of a Captain Jenkins, a seaman, whose evidence of brutality at the hands of the Spaniards precipitated public indignation. Though an agreement with the Spanish government was attempted by Walpole in the "Convention", the King, his hand forced by the Opposition which played up popular feeling, declared the war of Jenkin's Ear. Chesterfield again put his foot in by expressing the hope in the House of Lords that the war would end past jealousies and disunity. Even Argyle and Scarborough, former advocates of Walpole's policies, supported this sentiment. But the protestation of Chesterfield against the unwillingness of the Minister to revise his policies under fire and also the informal coalition of their friends with their foe injured Walpole and the King. At last convinced of the necessity of either converting or removing their formidable adversary, they were a bit late in the realization. Chesterfield was the connection between the Opposition parties in the House and Commons and the advisor to the Prince of Wales. The subsequent defeat of Walpole's party in the elections was attributed to him.

In the following period Chesterfield continued with renewed enthusiasm a participant in Parliamentary affairs and measures concerning the conduct of the war. He allowed himself respite, however, for a trip to Sweden and France.

His experiences among the French according to his correspondence at this time were educational and afforded him opportunity to discover the irreconcilable relationships between common sense and the tastes, diversions, and idiosyncratic fashions of Europeans. In a letter to Dr. Chenevix he says:

> "Travel is, unquestionably, a very proper part of the education of our youth; and like our bullion, I would allow them to be exported. But people of a certain age are beyond refining, and once stamped here, like our coin, should be confined within the kingdom. The impressions they have received make them current here, but obstruct their currency anywhere else, and they only return disguised, defaced and probably much lessened in the weight."

He was offered no position corresponding to his personal consequence upon the formation of a new Ministry. He had asked for none, and as he had opposed trends and offices rather than those who were responsible for them he was satisfied with events as they occurred and willing to remain in private life with a good conscience as his reward. In view of Chesterfield's threatened litigation over the property bequeathed to his wife by George I, his opposition to Walpole, incitement of the Prince and slander against the King the royal personage could not brook further the interference certain to come of a domestic appointment. The King consented to award him the Viceroyalty of Ireland. Previous to accepting the Lord-Lieutenancy of Ireland he was to proceed to the Hague as Ambassador in charge of negotiations. That Chesterfield had rather a fanciful impression of the

seriousness of the Irish situation can be assumed from his rationalistic summary of his reasons for accepting the post.* He said that he had chosen the Irish Viceroyalty because:

> " it was a place wherein a man had business enough to hinder him from falling asleep and not so much as to keep him awake; partly because he wanted to have it in his power to do for little people who were attached to him and had suffered for him ... and partly because it gave him an entrance into the royal closet either frequently or once in six weeks ... since it was a cabinet place."

It is with characteristically good humored regret that "he must have come into the closet through thorns and briars, with his face all scratched." But we can hardly believe that Chesterfield looked upon the Irish appointment only as a back door into the King's favor. As Craig points out, "This manner of putting things is eminently characteristic of a man who uniformly disclaimed all motives for his conduct which were not founded upon the most absolute selfishness, whilst never failing to carry out the work set before him with an ardour of self-sacrifice unexampled among his compeers."

It is neither here nor there to trace the history of Chesterfield's brief experience as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland. The Irish House of Lords had been deprived of judicial power, trade and industry repressed, and Roman Catholic worship partly suspended. It was no doubt a welcome surprise to the natives to encounter in the new arrival a man of exertion

* Craig "Life of Lord Chesterfield", pg. 214:

who though commissioned to protect the Establishment nevertheless respected religious liberty and conscientious observances. The two-fold duty was difficult in that English Protestantism was the badge of authority and tenure and its adherents comprised the representatives of law and order. Catholicism was to the English mind symbolical of Popery, an influence which no one feared more than Chesterfield as an instrument of Irish political alienation. Though his own life was not so morally scrupulous that he could assume the role of pious defender of the faith he was sincerely tolerant of Catholicism as a religious philosophy; therefore, he took care to guarantee equal legal rights for all regardless of creed and also to relieve the political oppression and confiscation of property with which the Catholic population had been visited. His first charge was to effect the King's business. He took it upon himself to acquit his duties well and with special regard to the impartial administration of justice, and the Irish people respected him at least for his generous compulsion. His Continental personality, manners, eloquence, wit and intellect at once appealed to the Irish imagination and won their respect. While he did not leave with them the impression that he feared them he gave them no hint that he either distrusted or lacked confidence in them. His approach to the situation was a decided factor in bolstering morale.

How he soft-pedalled the religious issue which many of his Protestant retainers were anxious to aggravate is shown to advantage in the following anecdotes from Craig.*

> " A courtier warned him that one of his coachmen was a Roman Catholic who went privately to Mass. 'Does he, indeed? Well, I will take care he shall never carry me there.'"

He also discouraged the alarmist hysteria which continually threatened to take fire.

> " A castle official brought him one morning intelligence that 'the people of Connaught are actually rising' or so he had heard; whereupon Chesterfield, having first deliberately consulted his watch, replied with much composure: 'Well, it is nine o'clock, and certainly time for them to rise.'"

Through ridicule tempered by watchfulness and the easy example of his own composure he was able to maintain the calm during a period of insular and Continental Jacobite activity.

Chesterfield was admired by the people whose growth was arrested by oppression and a natural acquiescence that had become habitual largely through enforcement. This man who derided the mere evidence of sentimentality was genuinely fond of these people and years after he left them considered himself in a letter to the Bishop of Waterford, " still an Irishman." It was for him, like the writing of the letters to his son, an experience of the heart which revealed what by practice he was not and what by nature he could have been had he concerned himself less with the arti-

* Craig, pg. 223

ficiality and externals of the world. Events in England, meanwhile, together with Chesterfield's notable success in Ireland had softened the King's antipathy toward him. The Queen and Hervey were deceased, and Lord Harrington was in dishonor. Consequently, the latter's seals were transferred to the Earl, and Chesterfield became Secretary of State. It was an unhappy period for him both because of the inactivity of his office and because of the war against France involving England and his beloved Holland, a strife which he entered office too late to prevent.

Chesterfield throughout his career had seen more of the rottenness and artificiality of life than of the nobler manifestations. Yet through it all he had performed his duty and willingly served the interests of his country. Because of the pettiness of the social and political circles he frequented and the frustrations confronting him from the knowledge that he was powerless against the intolerable system he had become perhaps in a negative way a very wise and a very tired man --- none the less patriotic but apathetic and rather justifiably selfish. From Bath in February of 1748 he wrote the following:

> " Without affectation, I feel most sensibly the comforts of my present free and quiet situation; and if I had much vanity in my composition, of which I really think that I have less than most people, even that vanity would be fully gratified by the voice of the public on this occasion. But, upon my word, all the busy, tumultuous passions have subsided in me; and that not so much from philosophy as from a little reflection upon a

> great deal of experience. I have been behind the scenes both of pleasure and of business. I have seen all the coarse pulleys and dirty ropes which exhibit and move all the gaudy machines; and I have seen and smelt the tallow candles which illuminate the whole decoration to the astonishment and admiration of the ignorant audience."

In a period in which every man had his price Lord Chesterfield was able to sustain his ethical honor. This was an achievement in the eighteenth century even for a man of good breeding and at a time when low moral principles were flattered by fastidiousness and encouraged by courtly example and worldly wisdom a becoming mask for those who were slaves to expediency and advantage.

II Discussion of Chesterfield's Letters to his Son:

Analysis and Criticism:

Chesterfield resisted efforts to recall him to official duties and devoted his time to the construction of a town house and a villa and to the patronage of art. A worthy decrepitude, according to contemporary standards, for a man of action. Much of his time was devoted to correspondence with his son, then about seventeen (1750), who after two years at Lausanne and Leipsic was travelling on the continent with the Rev. Mr. Harte. Berlin, Vienna, and Turin were on the itinerary but the younger Stanhope, owing to a sudden illness, was forced to forego the latter in favor of Venice, Naples, and Rome. Throughout the tour his father saw to it that he was afforded the proper introductions. The boy was healthy, proficient in his studies and amiable enough but wanted the grace and presence and worldly knowledge of human nature with which his father longed to equip him. It was but natural for the adolescent youth to want these qualities --- "les manieres, le politesse, et la tournure of a man of fashion."[*1] According to St. Beuve young Stanhope was one of those ordinary men of the world "of whom it suffices to say there is nothing to be said." I recall reading in the letters of Mme. de Sevigné that Chesterfield's son was a tolerable gentleman but quite the opposite to what his father expected him to be.

As one reads the letters there is an absence of moral indoctrination as such. Chesterfield, as we have seen, was

* To Dayrolles, October 5, 1751, Craig, pg. 54

too much the man of conscience to parade a didactic morality before his illegitimate son.* Furthermore, he attributed to the youth, perhaps unwisely, the natural possession of common sense, which he presumed the youth to have inherited. He has been criticized unjustly by moderns inasmuch as they have lost eighteenth century rapport. It must be remembered, too, that Chesterfield's educational precepts were designed for the benefit of an individual preparing for a particular profession and not intended as a manual for general use. That the latter use has been misinterpreted as a primary one is proved by the famous comment of the authoritative Johnson: "Take out the immorality, and they should be put into the hands of every young man." The letters of candor and not intended for publication exalt the personal ideal. They are written for the benefit of a young man of rank and position, preparing to assume a diplomatic office and the duties of courtier, statesman, and politician; that they dwell upon the cultivation of social intelligence at the expense of a more healthy and perhaps more sincere naivete is both true and intentional. So it is not as an ethical or moral code but as a handbook of social etiquette, diplomacy, and worldly wisdom that we must accept the essential philosophy and purpose of these letters.

The presumption by Dr. Johnson and others as to the universal purpose and nature of the letters is erroneous. For while the letters have a catholic appeal in their frequent

* By Mme. Du Bouchet

and individualized recognition of self-evident truth pertaining to the operations of human nature they do not represent an ideal philosophy which should be universally acceptable then or now. Chesterfield looked at life as it was and not as it should have been and sought to advance his son in the most intelligent way and in the most desirable and profitable field of endeavor. His choice of a diplomatic career for his son admitted of many complications, but the morality of that highly secular profession was no more subject to censure than any other under the influence of a corrupt Ministry and decadent Court. The fact that practical Chesterfield encourages his son in the gallant usages of the world reveals nothing more than that he was an opportunist who recognized the advantage and good sense of conformity as a means to advancement. This does not mean that he considered gallantry an excuse for indulgence or that he was unaware of and did not admire the simpler virtues which he recognized but knew through experience to be inexpedient to the man of affairs. The essential fallacy of turning his attention to expediency and of embracing a "carpe diem" mode of life is that it leads to the defeat of spiritual values and even if it escapes the extremes of hedonism can with its intellectuality chill the warmth of the soul. At times the very artfulness of worldly wisdom can be destructive. It is often better to be deceived by others than to deceive, for deception is an accomplishment which however necessary or

expedient at the moment undermines our better nature.

Chesterfield, however, avoided citing the expediency of hypocrisy in matters of social conduct. His practical preference of being a libertine rather than a Libertine Destroyed (like the protagonist of a contemporary play in translation from Moliere) may appear to some a surface indication if not a proof of his immorality. Actually he was neither hypocrite, nor stoic, nor cleric; but a man who would not and could not ignore either the natural passions or the basic necessity for acclimating nature and civilization (or man and society) so that the two become complementary. He met the problem of social adjustment without much sentiment or scruple but with concern for practicality. But in the weakness or virtue (as you will) of human nature he was as much the theorist as the practitioner of these views. He fell rather short of nobility and undoubtedly will ever appear so in the minds of his critics because he is often satisfied with mere appearances without due attention to reality, which constitutes not an allergy but a disregard to truth. Out of this casuistry no one could make a case for his inspirational or spiritual powers which he alternately minimizes and ignores either through conscious resistance or lack of feeling. Nevertheless, I do not believe that this discrepancy quite approximates the difference between morality and immorality. After all, Chesterfield never pretends in his letters to make morality an issue for

his sincere concern. He is more the mentor and drill master of a decrepit society toward which as the letters progress he becomes more bitterly resigned and immune. But nowhere is he righteously contemptuous of society. The morality he preached was in part sophistical and surely not the best that he could understand, but it was for him the most sound to which with a good conscience he could subscribe. He is not altruistic or progressive; he does not reflect character so much as manners. But again recalling the age in which he lived makes us wonder how he could possibly corrupt it in moral tone. If anything his letters are a comparative though somewhat equivocal encouragement to general morality -- even if that function must be considered unintentional. Taken separately, the subjects may seem trivial, but in the aggregate they are important. The art of complimenting character and virtue by good breeding; the art of flattery as an instrument of social usage; the art of affecting graceful manner in speech and writing. He is intentionally repetitious, and the imposition of his ideas upon his beloved son is catechumenal. The letters should not necessarily appear ridiculous and petty to the deeply religious or appeal only to those of chameleon-like scruple. They are, nevertheless, a miscellaneous encouragement of physical grace and mental subtlety. He is careful to discriminate between a useful life of appropriate business and elegant pleasure and an existence of pleasure taken up as a business. The letters

are permeated by this more conservative tone. His observations, generally candid, sensible, and the more palatable for their colorful expression, are free of elaborate diction and yet are couched in superb dignity. Similarly, his smooth-flowing style is natural and conversational but in a scholarly and dignified rather than in a colloquial sense.

The Earl's matter-of-factness, his talent for making a discovery or revelation seem casual, his remarkable freedom from the obvious platitude or studied phrase --- the hall marks of his individuality, are the cause of an apparent good sense and the effect of subtle good taste. Undoubtedly his lack of sentiment in part accounts for this. But his power of discrimination, though without the fetters or inspiration of spiritual direction (as the case may be), is as excellent as a superb blend of judgment and wisdom can achieve. It is doubtful that Chesterfield's letters had they been less private would have been less self-conscious. I may have implied this previously. The urbanity of the letters is natural and convincing; each is superb in its "raison", its "eclat" or its adornment; each reflects, too, a French candour and, should the choice be made, a preference for refined vice over corrupt sham. Although, I must admit, it requires a shrewd, selfish, and objective Chesterfield to know where to draw the line between what is smart and what is smut.

It is a bit incongruous that a man of wit, taste, fashion, and worldly wisdom whose more public writings are informal

social calendars of conduct and manners should devote himself to a careful, educational correspondence to his son that is full of advice and sensible instruction in the cultivation of breeding and culture. These were not the letters that established him as "the glass of fashion and the mould of form." Yet there is a temptation to censure his hard-boiled worldliness, his at once analytical and sweeping appraisals of society. Dr. Johnson, no doubt embittered by his unhappy experiences with the Earl during the formulation of the Dictionary, and humiliated by being kept waiting in a reception room while a Colley Cibber or Beau Nash commanded Chesterfield's attention, sums him up petulantly as having "the morals of a whore and the manners of a dancing master." Hardly a conclusive or well-founded brace of epithets but one inspired by prejudicial hatred, encouraged by wounded vanity, and flattered by apt phraseology. Johnson, angered, was being passionate, unreasonable, and human. The truth in the matter is that Chesterfield, a man of grace, refinement, and worldly culture, understood the value to the individual of social prestige as a means to advancement. True, his appreciation of society in its social virtue was ultra-practical, his concept of ethics rather utilitarian, more hampered by elegance, unmorality, and opportunism than felicitated by simpler, more modest virtues. He recognizes morality, for example, but as a criterion of society imposed for the sake of order and nicety either to be

observed or ignored as expediency or occasion should require. This is hardly a sympathetic or sentimental comprehension of ideals. Nevertheless, this man knew and could appreciate objectively the finer as well as the baser emotions. He often boasted that he had never experienced the hatred, anger, or envy that he observed in others. Evidently he saw no reason for resisting these common elements of human nature. All the best in his philosophy as well as the worst is the servile product of sense and utility. He knew the ways of the world; he could recognize the real and the unreal, the significant as well as the worthless in life. His enthusiasm for good for its own sake or for unobtrusive virtues is so jaded by a practical perspective that his depreciative critics could well consider him not immoral but unmoral.

His philosophy has all the perceptive wisdom requisite to a sound set of values, apparently, but wants enthusiasm, idealism, and spirituality, qualities which he might tolerate except in the over-zealous but which he despised and pitied and could not attain. He did not cut a spectacular figure as a literateur other than in the letters; and those to his son are dominant in value to his biographers. Far from a neo-classicist he scoffed at the excesses of tradition, the hauteur of the dogmatists, and the senselessness of custom, the latter always an amusement to him in his travels. Yet he is quick to conform to those customs which are convenient,

graceful, and reasonable. His is an unprofessional literary ability, his natural style and original thought distinguished by meaningful and simple clearness.

The letters for the most part are of a proper length that preserves for us their smooth phraseology and a delivery simple in manner yet sophisticated in tone. They are graduated in tone and scope to accomodate the various periods of development, the particular experiences, and contemporary occupations of his son. They are random writings that derive their subject matter from topics of interest, a remark of his son in a previous letter. Or they may be based on a report of his son's progress by Mr. Harte or from one of Chesterfield's friends on the continent to whom he constantly applied for their patronage of his son. The letters stress the value of personal experience in the mastery of language, love, and the situations of life. In their variety they provide a kaleidoscopic view of eighteenth century society. But in spite of his practicality Chesterfield is not superficial. He takes delight in exposing authoritatively those pseudo-intellectuals who assume the method of the scholar but who are without his material, the manners of the courtier without his taste. These he contemns as mere graceless imitators. Although a gentleman of the court he is disgusted by the abuses of foppery as much as by the literary abuses of pedantry.

Though the proof of the pudding is in the eating, neither

the fancy of Dr. Samuel Johnson's criticism nor the fact of his son's mediocrity should invalidate Chesterfield's educational philosophy. At Westminster school the youth was pedantic in his attention to his studies but slovenly in the care of his person. After completing a pattern suggested by his father in modern and ancient language and modern history he spent considerable time abroad with Mr. Harte, whose influence, however, was more scholastic than worldly. Boswell, meeting the young man on the continent pronounced him "sensible, civil, well-behaved", but there is no evidence that he showed promise of mastering the graces at the time. Tolerable in his debut at Paris and unimpressive in the House the youth has been laughed at and his mediocrity accepted prima facie as evidence of Chesterfield's folly. Though unsuccessful in practice for want of material to work with the Earl did arrive at worthy conclusions which we will consider further.

III Chesterfield's Educational Philosophy: Background and Motivation:

A considerable body of material had been published on the continent on the subject of education both traditional and progressive. Cicero's De Officiis, Burghley's Advice, and a similar work by Raleigh. The Cortegliano by Castigliano and Della Casa's Galateo were important treatises on education. In England Ascham's Scholemaster and Toxophilus which encouraged physical education were more anglicized and patriotic in extolling the homely virtues than would meet with Chesterfield's approval. The famous Moral Reflections of La Rochefoucauld, and also French Monsieur La Bruyere's Characters and Locke's Essays on Education were sources of important educational theory. Rousseau's Emile, in which he premised the perfectibility and natural goodness of Man as a thesis for educational development, offered the example of a practical experiment in education.

Granted that Chesterfield's aspirations do not match his potential greatness and that he would often make politeness serve for morality as a sacrifice in his worship of the personal ideal, his useful reflections and individual thinking are distinguished for more than a charnel house sociology. If we are to determine whether or not he was the successful director of his son's education we must know something of his concept of the nature and purpose of education. Chesterfield was dynamic enough and intelligent enough to have developed independently of authority definite

views on this subject. He was, of course, influenced by the new enthusiasm for scientific enlightenment. This enthusiasm directed itself to the realistic study and application of classical learning. In the movement known as Humanism, a reaction against the idolatry of form and style in favor of a modern analysis of idea and content, scholars supported the classical notion that all true and imperishable knowledge was to be derived from the study of the Bible, the classical languages, and ancient literatures. The humanistic scholars evolved a new philosophy whereby these classical studies were directed toward the cultivation of practical knowledge useful to contemporary society rather than toward the imitation of classical pedantry, the revival of technical form, and the perpetuation of Greco-Roman culture. It was an essentially different and more practical approach to the fund of knowledge acquired through antiquity. They accepted as their premise that ancient learning and true Christian philosophy were inseparable and as their conclusion that the study of languages and the Bible was the means to enlightenment. Other scholars, among them the French nobleman, and writer, Michel de Montaigne and the English philosopher John Locke, were the exponents of a more realistic education, that of the man of affairs. It is as a disciple of these men that Chesterfield arrests our attention. And as an educator.

As an educational philosopher the elder Stanhope

declares himself in favor of a useful type of education. He is less concerned with the pedantry of the earlier humanists and the scholarly education of the professional man and more attentive to the development of character and the training of a gentleman in the social arts and graces. And so he stresses the instrumental value of experience in learning and as a necessary corollary advocates the superiority of the tutorial system or private academic training. This interpretation of the means and end of education has far-reaching implications even beyond its usefulness in our consideration of his letters to his son; in his contribution to this doctrine Chesterfield is characteristically Continental.

Like his predecessors, Montaigne and Locke, he particularly planned for the education of the sons of the gentry and nobility. He does not appear worried like Rousseau about the welfare of any other class of people. He is interested in the cultivation of the graces as the furniture of the well-bred man of the world as distinguished from the scholars, the clergy, and the nobility but not without the knowledge, dignity, and "aimable" of these groups. His position in the social and political world and his influence on his contemporaries who considered and accepted him as an authority together are the bastions of his position in support of the gallant and courtly education. While he does not condemn the universities as pedantic museums he favors the live-and-learn methods of experience under the guidance

of a tutor as the best means of cultivating the social arts; the motive of this experience, according to Locke, is to have "the Knowledge of a Man of Business, a Carriage suitable to his Rank, and to be eminent and useful to his country, according to his Station." This point of view upheld by Chesterfield contributed largely to the modern practicality of education expanded from the narrow basis of conventional academic material and extended to include a greater part of society. In another and more important sense, we should realize, it did little to encourage, at the time of its formulation, the spread of educational opportunity to the people and rather strengthened the position of private education than the cause of public education.

In its better sense Chesterfield's concept of education is broad, practical, and inclusive in both the scope of its emphasis and the selection of material. It is admirable for its unprecedented and formal recognition of experience as an essential element in education. Not that Chesterfield frowned upon study or academic achievement provided that such achievement is not of mere disciplinary value. Modern educational psychology seems to bear him out in this, for the degree of transfer in the so-called disciplinary subjects has been found relatively slight or negligible. He accepts booklearning as the means to basic information and as a foundation for one's own elaborative thinking. But it is the means to an end and not an end in itself. His let-

ters to his son are full of admonitions against a pompous display of learning and overbearing patronage which he must have disliked in Johnson, and particularly against the error of quoting passages in public merely to display learning, a device of the pedant unable to speak for himself; he suggests wearing one's learning well like a fine watch which one may produce when asked the time and not take out deliberately to "tell off the hours that the company may know one has a watch."* He advises his son to apply himself to the classics to familiarize himself with the intellectual and cultural heritage of mankind. In addition to this, however, there is a complementary value of individual thinking and of the wisdom derived from the experience of everyday living. Chesterfield contended that while it is desirable and necessary for the well-bred, educated man to keep the company of the literateur and be at home in it, nevertheless it is neither desirable nor necessary for him to make frequenting that or any exclusive company his goal. Because of its social limitations and restrictions as well as its intellectual stagnation, exclusive company should not become habitual to the man of affairs. Nor should he be the habitue of a particular group but should cultivate the ability through experience to associate in and ornament a variety of companies, equal to, superior to, but never below his station. And this, I believe, is in essence Chesterfield's purpose in

* Letters: to his son, 1751, Sayle, pg. 62

encouraging his son in social attributes vital to his reception in a variety of companies throughout the courts of Europe.

Just as both power and skill are complementary factors in the development of a creative artist, and heredity and environment are complementary influences in the development of the social individual, so experience and booklearning are complementary influences in the education of a man; the former elements -- power, heredity, experience determine the intensity and potential range of development in a given direction; the latter -- skill, environment, booklearning determine the degree and extent of development. Chesterfield's recognition of the primary importance of talent and experience and his criticism of the exaggeration of technique and booklearning is the foundation for a progressive approach to a traditional problem. He would avoid, like any man of sense, the extremes of the fop and the pedagogue, the illiterate and the pedant.

The test of which of the above-mentioned elements are the more important is determined by investigating as to which factors can stand alone or contain a self-sustaining value. We should find that power, heredity, and experience can stand alone and are intrinsically valuable although complemented, the one by skill, a second by environment, and the third by booklearning. Now the latter elements cna never stand alone because of their inherent dependence on the former group.

They are not primary or natural but interpretative and developing factors, not independent of but complementary to the basic factors. Though the primary factors, power, heredity, and experience, must be present before any progress or vital existence can occur for the social individual the secondary factors, skill, environment, and booklearning, are not indispensable, for even a marked degree of social and intellectual progress is possible provided that the primary or basic factors are advantageous. It seems reasonable, then, that Chesterfield did not exaggerate the inherent value of experience in education provided that it bears the same relation to booklearning as that of talent to skill or heredity to environment.

Experience is important. Chesterfield recognized the value of travel as one door to experience; he sought to prepare his son with the key to it by training him in the acquisition of graceful manners so that he should not be like those pedants who though they travel remain at home. Experience was Chesterfield's basis for the development of social intelligence. We may define it as the evidence of an endowment of good sense, judgment, and right behavior. And this social intelligence is a basic source and means of abstract thinking; it is the essence of real intelligence. It is not indicated by academic ability or subject matter facility, with perhaps the exception of English (vocabulary, speech, conversational ability), for aptitude and achievement are

relative and variable standards of intelligence limited by the mathematical impossibility of measuring abstract intelligence by the concrete standards of subject matter. But this social intelligence is indicated most particularly by the ability of the individual to adjust himself to the ever changing requirements of social experience, to meet social situations, to interpret social motives, to utilize his intellectual ability to advantage, to encounter and understand all types of people through subjugation of the passions --- all of which must come from experience. Very often tuition has a strictly limited application to social problems. But experience, though it may involve trial and error, is invariably valuable. Booklearning or tuition is rarely more valid or helpful in these situations than is the advice of a person who has been through a situation to another person about to have a similar experience. All the implications of a situation or the complexities of a problem can rarely be conveyed save through experience. No artificial or otherwise secondary means of information however helpful can be adequate to replace it. A chief fallacy of the letters to Chesterfield's son, for example, is that they are over-zealous in their cautious direction and in tone too anxious to control the environment of the younger Stanhope.

In abstract thinking, social adjustment, and the accumulation of worldly wisdom including a knowledge of the workings of human nature experience is the basic instrument

of measurement and the first principle of social conduct. Chesterfield recognized the value of experience in the integration and development of the individual and particularly in the cultivation of essential human qualities, as we have seen. No man of education would make a complete separation, however, between social intelligence and scholastic aptitude; no man of sense would declare these parts strictly independent or mutually exclusive, for though the former is more abstract and profound and the latter more concrete and skillful there is a distinct correlation. Scholarship often indicates but never guarantees the presence of social intelligence; abstract intelligence, in turn, is closely associated with business and professional abilities.

In addition to clarifying a practical type of education Chesterfield has encouraged the tradition of private education. But in its very nature the private education of his son had its limitations. True, it may well have prepared him for a diplomatic career, but it could not have inculcated in him a recognition of his obligations to society in general. Though it is Chesterfield's purpose to dignify a special type of education and realize its exclusive advantages, it is at the sacrifice of desirable human qualities and to the disregard of the general welfare. His philosophy of education creates certain difficulties as applied to modern standards or those of his day -- to a lesser degree.

Private education may afford a degree of academic specialization and achievement difficult to accomplish under the necessary restrictions of public education --- unselective, non-sectarian, and cosmopolitan. The tutorial system, at the same time, affords no consideration to popular education. We have observed this in the southern parts of our own country where private education was encouraged by the planter aristocracy and even today is a mark of prosperity and prestige in contrast to the supposed degradation of attendance at public or charity schools (as they were once known). We know that Chesterfield was essentially an aristocrat who except for his love of speaking took even his seat in the House of Lords rather lightly and without too great concern for objective and political obligations. It was perhaps natural and at the time correct for him to consider the masses an unenlightened public. A view worthy of controversy; and one supported even today. In fairness to both sides of the question let us digress briefly.

Those of us who have seen some of the fallacies of private education wonder whether or not in a sense it defeats its own purpose, that of creating a whole and complete and integrated individual. Surely it is an excellent means of outfit for the student who is to assume in society the responsibilities inherent in the management of affairs perhaps involving wealth and social position --- and in this regard it would be suited to the younger Stanhope's needs;

moreover, private education is an excellent instrument for religious training --- inculcating faith and inspiration and enthusiasm for religious ideals through training and discipline; and lastly, it is an unexcelled and in many instances a superior organ of academic training and a source of imparting a fine cultural background. But if social intelligence depends upon experience, then private education, whether tutorial or institutional, neither of which provides adequate primary experience, must fail in the chief aim of education, the development of the personality. Granted that the tutor or the private school may permit and provide a superior type of scholastic training and that they may be in a position to better direct the individual in the formation of character and the cultivation of culture, nevertheless they each fail in the development of the personality which must build upon the ability to encounter and orientate oneself among people of diverse faith, political philosophy, social background, and economy. None can deny that this is an essential ability for all except perhaps a few so endowed with time and money and so self-interested as to afford withdrawing to a cloister to devote themselves to book of verse and jug of wine. The private type of education fails in the orientation of the individual, fails to prepare him for a place in the business and social world. The failure is caused essentially by certain barriers which appear inevitably as prejudices and spring from the want of experience

and are set up unfortunately in the process of private education.

Not that we should necessarily be free of ideas and beliefs different from those of others. Still, we should be able to understand coöperatively our points of difference with mutual toleration and be able to discover wherein we enjoy a common plane of interest or understanding with others. Private schools fail in the socialized aspect of education, of interest to us because it is an extension of Chesterfield's dogma, not because of an essential bias or bigotry in the method and material of their instruction program. Quite the contrary. Inasmuch as they are private institutions and under the constant surveillance and competitive functioning of public institutions many of them are careful to adopt a policy of presenting all aides of every question. A procedure which is not observed justly in many institutions which are public whether directly by virtue of established constitution or State subsidy, or indirectly because of large enrollment and cosmopolitan clientage. A certain amount of subjectivity should of course be expected of private institutions in the direction of their training and the emphasis given to certain aspects of the material. This is not an exclusive but a natural privilege. There is no guarantee that the teacher in the public school or the instructor in the non-sectarian or State university will not similarly exercise a selective presentation of the

material. Therefore, the danger of private and similarly of parochial education is not in the presentation of material. Nor is the material itself the source of creating social barriers so much as the private student's lack of social experience through contact with others of different background, religion, and philosophy. The significant conclusion from these observations is that however valuable experience may be it, too, can be abused through limitation or unwise direction.

IV Discussion of Purpose and Effect of Letters to his Son: (pg. 45)

The success or failure of an experiment does not always determine the validity of its hypothesis. Chesterfield's disappointment in the result from his efforts in planning his son's education does not indicate the failure of those principles of education to which he subscribed. We have seen that the Earl by his own example did not always follow his own advice or given precepts. He made much of insignificant people charmed more by their glitter than by their parts; he refused to flatter and even insulted his potential benefactors. So it is not incomprehensible that he should fall short of infallibility in the direction of his son's course. True, no less an authority than Mme. de Sevigné once remarked that the younger Stanhope was a typical English country gentleman, genial and sincere enough, but as lacking in the social graces and courtly attributes as anyone she ever hoped to see. Though his scholarship is reputed to have been fairly good, he lacked the spirit, understanding, and versatility of mind as well as the calculating cleverness of his father. Undoubtedly his father expected too much of him and predestined him to the fulfillment of obligations too difficult for him to assume. The younger Stanhope was constantly under the supervision of his father at school and abroad; his every move was reported to his father. These circumstances, however, Chesterfield may have counteracted them with constant evidences of trust and confidence in his son, evidently succeeded in subjecting the youth to the arresting dominance of his father.

Perfectionist that he was in matters pertaining to the building of character in the man of the world and the outfitting of the gentleman in the manners of court society, Chesterfield must have known as well as anyone that life is a constant search, struggle, and compromise in the pursuit of happiness. And that a variety of elements go into its making according to our individual concept of what happiness is. Even though we have seen him commit an error common to perfectionists by estimating too highly the material with which he worked, he knew the necessity of compromise. It is not difficult for Chesterfield's critics to censure him for his art of compromising on moral and ethical as well as political issues. It is more practicable even from a contemporary point of view to understand the inevitable necessity of compromise. Chesterfield sacrificed only a large degree of sentimentality common to many of us in recognizing the limitations of human nature and the separate levels of human dignity. This recognition comes not from a narrow mind or small soul but from the wisdom of experience. And his wisdom is justified by our own everyday experience.

Many of us are constantly seeking the virtues in others. Friendship, for example, is a meaningful experience; and Chesterfield would agree to its value; but it is also very rare. We know it is meaningful, but many of us need to be convinced that it is rare. The conviction usually reaches us through experience and compromise. For many genuine friendship

has a deeper significance than love because of its often more intellectual and spiritual bonds. But in our quest for true friends we are forced to accept disappointment ameliorated by compromise; we are often baffled by the conflict in our minds as to whether friendship is to be evaluated according to a relative or a fixed standard. Two friends must have something in common to begin with; they must have a common understanding or enjoy a common plane of interest where two individual natures may meet. It is impossible for two extremely opposite individuals to be friends; they need not be enemies, but the chances are remote of their ever being friends. Chesterfield understood that like impossibilities actually exist and often chose to cultivate in his son those characteristics, however external, which should endear him to the right people in preference to those characteristics which even though more individualistic might detract from his acceptance in society. Indeed, Chesterfield's own personal appearance was from the natural accident of birth unimpressive and even a little incongruous in view of his intellectual stature. He overcame the disadvantage by acquiring polish and finesse and learned from early experience the not unhappy value of compromise. He wanted for his son distinction, not the individuality that comes from abnormality.

Our likes and dislikes, our background be it social, economic, religious, or political, our aims and interests determine in considerable measure whom our friends shall be.

Therefore, there is a decidedly relative element in friendship depending on the temperament and functions of the persons involved. On the other hand there are certain standards which we have set up egotistically perhaps but also by laws of behavior which logic assumes characteristic of a true friend. By these standards a friend may be trustworthy, free of envy or jealousy, dependable, and interested in the welfare of others. This restriction may naturally limit the existence of our friends to the few individuals in every circle who can naturally satisfy them. Furthermore, each characteristic is inter-dependent on the others, and genuine friendship does not exist if any one quality should be lacking. Practical analysis enables us to discover that there are three principal groups of people whom we encounter in our society. Those whom we do not meet on any common ground whatever except that of mutual respect or civil toleration; those with whom we may enjoy mutual good-will and companionship, and those whom we respect for simple excellences -- enthusiasm, sincerity, morality; and those with whom we form a lasting and mutual understanding that is strong in its intellectual and spiritual bonds. These three groups are proportionately dignified, in my opinion, according to the degree to which they accommodate the requirements of friendship. Those of us who are idealists would perhaps expect everyone to measure up to the third, most exclusive group. And not only reject those who do not approximate our ideal but also exaggerate the character of

those who more nearly live up to it. In these practices we should want the sense and judgment of a Chesterfield. A person who has one or more virtues of the true friend may be without the others. To seek perfection only is an adolescent and selfish habit of the mind. It is neither necessary, possible, nor practicable that all our associates and acquaintances should be our friends. Nor is it possible or desirable that we should have everyone's friendship or even his companionship. These associations are partly relative based upon common parts, and partly absolute based on intelligence, character, and the virtues. To have the companionship or friendship of everyone or of a great many people, were it possible, signifies no appreciable virtue but often denotes a superficial and passive popularity without compliment or quality. Few people can be worthy associates; and even fewer can be genuine friends; our selection of both is limited by relative tastes or the senses, by absolute standards or the intellect, and above all by the flaws in human nature which complicate social relationships. An intelligent person seeks both friendship and companionship. But the one we do not live up to, and the other we misjudge. Nevertheless, everyone, high and low, is capable either of deserving or feeling respect. This respect is the basis of reputation in the community. We should seek to avoid the person or pursuit that detracts from it and cultivate all that contributes to to it. And the maintenance of that respect at once emphasizes

and proves the need for compromise. Of the vast majority of persons in the community we should have respect; with a lesser number, our social acquaintances and business associates, we may enjoy in addition to respect a certain companionship; and with a very small group who over a period of years have shown the attributes of friendship, it is safe to participate in lasting friendship. This is adequate proof of the necessity of compromise and a justification of Chesterfield's policy. He knew the indispensable value of respect and did not hesitate to take the easiest way to achieve it. We observe this in his distaste for the libertinism that was crude and animal-like rather than refined and fashionable; in the latter form he was able to reconcile libertinism and its practices and the respect of society. And if in this he appears inconsistent we must remember that he was at once a man of taste and a man of dual personality who in his less estimable passions and expressions sought amusement rather than licentious indulgence. He does not reject ideals of character or whatever is (or appears to be) theoretically perfect. He is a practical opportunist with a respect for conservative tradition and a deference toward unproved modernity.

V Chesterfield As A Letter Writer

The letter as a form of expression is significant for its intimate reflection of the personality of the writer and the period in which it is written. A period of high social and intellectual activity, of political corruption and moral iniquity, the eighteenth century lends its composite and intense society as a fertile source of the letter. Chesterfield exemplifies the ideal characteristics of the letter writer of his time. A penetrating intelligence, a sophisticated but not blase worldliness, a half amused but not cynical, and half distorted recognition of fact and fallacy in social error and political abuse, an often promiscuous sincerity of thought not without an occasional tongue in the cheek, original and intimate expression, a lightness of touch, and ideally, at least, a naturalness unimpeded by artful effects --- free of pedantry yet complimented by evidence of applied learning and experience. In the familiar or informal letter he is more subjective, enthusiastic, sympathetic, and confident as much in the leisure at hand, perhaps, as because of the audience in prospect. The tone of the letters rather than the subject matter --- often too contemporary to sustain our interest --- both distinguishes the writer and attracts the reader.

Chesterfield's letters to his son have a utilitarian purpose. Inasmuch as they are instructive and often didactic complements to the education of a young man expected to enter the diplomatic service they are scaled and graded in

regard to length, type of subject matter, and frequency of repetition. In his eagerness to fashion his son into a mirror of social grace and model of scholarship he is a flexible utilitarian able to subscribe alike to the vanity of Polonius: "To thine own self be true"; and to the wisdom of Cicero: "Men evaluate by emotion, not by law, justice, or ideology." If we forget for a moment his advice concerning the necessity for tact and secrecy in illicit affairs which were accepted as a natural diversion of the court and even sanctioned by high clergymen, many of his views pertaining to the development of moral character are morally conservative. He exhorts his son toward ambition and enthusiasm but never at the expense of reputation.

He exhorts his son toward ambition not for the gratification of worldly desires but to acquire a reputation for having the attributes of "a man of sense and honor."* Almost as if in anticipation of his son's mediocrity he defends the importance of the lesser talents. Since the great talents are incomprehensible to society in general the lesser talents assume an importance because they are understood and evaluated by everyone. It is for this logical reason and not from vanity that Chesterfield advocates good-breeding as an admirable social asset. Here he shows his practicality also. For while virtue has its reward, honor its esteem, and learning its admiration, gentility arrests the attention, hypnotizes the

* Letters to His Son: number four; Sayle, pg. 5:

emotions through its appeal to the senses, and accordingly controls the judgment of the beholder. All of Chesterfield's advice has its source not in fancy, whim, or prejudice but in the basic tendencies of human nature. Perhaps there is an undue attention to the flaws of human nature in the theories which, from his conduct, may be said to comprise his general social philosophy. But for his day that emphasis is justified.

A romantic playwright once wrote, "Which of us is not forever a stranger and alone?" A sentiment fit to amuse Chesterfield. He insisted that man lives for society not for himself. It was in that belief, strikingly democratic in theory, that he encouraged attention to civil courtesy. He found it incomprehensible that a man of great talent like Samuel Johnson should be ill-received for want of little talent such as that of a Colley Cibber. If the reader shuddered earlier at the slight to Johnson it is now perhaps understood. Without attempting to excuse Chesterfield's error in withdrawing his patronage from the Dictionary enterprise we cannot help appreciate his disgust at Johnson's famous indelicacies. No gentleman would attempt to glorify himself through a rude ridicule of others or for the protection of his ego defend himself in argument by shouting at, bullying, and insulting his opponent. Chesterfield found Johnson's lack of civility impudent and intolerable, his slovenliness deplorable. Though the Earl deserved the

famous letter rejecting his patronage, he is Johnson's superior in matters of social grace, and his rejection of boorish company is justified. No man, however talented, can dispense with the social amenities and those observances which out of common courtesy are due his associates; the greater the man the more reasonable and becoming that he should cultivate the graces; the man of honest parts and versatile accomplishment knows the value of the subtlest courtesies.

It is likely that Chesterfield's son frequently misinterpreted his advice. No wonder, then, that the Earl's critics have misconstrued his position, and more attentive to the superficial tone of his words than to the inner wisdom of his thoughts have condemned him as a charlatan. Notably, Chesterfield's emphasis on manners is taken from the French. Consequently there was a good deal of suspicion of the Earl's Gallican directness which though difficult for moderns to imagine is a trait common to the French in pristine days. His own words are his best defense.

> "Virtue and learning, like gold, have their intrinsic value; but if they are not polished, they certainly lose a great deal of their luster; and even polished brass will pass upon more people than rough gold. What a number of sins does the cheerful, easy good-breeding of the French frequently cover? Many of them want common sense, many more common learning; but in general they make up so much by their manner for those defects that frequently they pass undiscovered. I have often said and do think that a Frenchman who, with a fund of virtue, learning, and good sense, has the manners and good-breeding of his country is the perfection of human nature. This perfection you may,

> if you please, and I hope you will, arrive at. You know what virtue is; you may have it if you will; it is in every man's power; and miserable is the man who has it not. Good sense God has given you. Learning you already possess enough of to have, in a reasonable time, all that a man need have. With this you are thrown out early into the world, where it will be your own fault if you do not acquire all the other accomplishments necessary to complete and adorn your character." *

Good-breeding, evidently, covers a multitude of sins. But we may observe from his remarks that the Earl did not concern himself with the business of trivial things. He does take notice of trivia, for he knows the effect of it which was felt to a marked degree in his day and which is observed to no less degree, though less marked, in our day. A man is on his guard in the social world, at his best in his profession. But the guard drops and he is suddenly at his worst when he gives way to ignoble passions and animal instincts whether the error be obvious or barely perceptible. It is in the little things that we are unmasked.

Chesterfield is sensible in his choice of the attributes of the worthy young man. He encourages his son to shine, but he knows that scintillation must come from an inner warmth and grace rather than from outward decoration. And so his selection of graces is founded on simplicity. He suggests adopting wise conformities with regard to the country or court one frequents, giving one's undivided attention in word and expression, never attacking an entire group for the

* Letters to his son: March 6, 1747; Leigh, pg. 9:

faults of an individual member, and never reporting the gossip or ridiculing the conduct of one circle to a second group, and always employing tact rather than frankness when the latter might prove harmful. These are civilities which both reveal and complement education.

We have observed Chesterfield's love of travel. It is his principal device in counteracting the insupportable fault common to English gentlemen. Intelligent travel, he suggests,*1 counteracts the "mauvais honte," the ashamed awkwardness in company characteristic of the adolescent. Only vice and ignorance should cause shame, he continues, and not the mere appearance in a company or environment to which one is unaccustomed.

He finds true pleasure inconsistent with vice, and unlike the example of his youth he prefers to follow the pleasures of Nature.*2 It is important to know the consequences of pleasure as well as the enjoyment of it. He recommends moderation in one's own indulgences and a toleration of the pursuits of one's fellows. He is always a gentle yet exacting taskmaster. "I'll love you while you deserve it" in "the practice of Virtue and the pursuit of Knowledge."*3 He urged his son to imitate the best models in life as well as in letters, to attend to study and to cultivate good company. "As of Scipio let it be said of you that you never

*1 Letters to his son: letter no. eight; Johnson, pg. 42:
*2 Letter no. ten; Johnson, pg. 48:
*3 Letters to his son: letter no. thirteen; Sayle, pg.28:

said, did or felt anything unworthy of praise."*

So far we have produced no great cause to doubt Chesterfield's religious scruple. He was not orthodox or sectarian; he feared the Papacy; he was aware of the low tone of clerical life in the Church of England. But whatever he lacked in his non-sectarianism he gained in his tolerance. An admirer of Voltaire, he nevertheless condemns iconoclasm and the injustice of persecution or ridicule that attacks the reason and belief of man. Respectful of the truth, he is eager to help his son become worthy through understanding. I would have the reader peruse in its entirety a letter written in September of 1747 to his son at Leipzig; it is a fine delineation of a wise man's tolerance, and reason.

> " Dear Boy: I received, by the last post your letter of the 8th, N.S., and I do not wonder that you are surprised at the credulity and superstition of the Papists at Einsiedlen, and at their absurd stories of their chapel. But remember, at the same time, that mistakes and errors, however gross, in matters of opinion, if they are sincere, are to be pitied, but not punished nor laughed at. The blindness of the understanding is as much to be pitied as the blindness of the eye; and there is neither jest nor guilt in a man's losing his way in either case. Charity bids us set him right if we can, by arguments and persuasions; but charity, at the same time, forbids, either to punish or ridicule his misfortune. Every man's reason is, and must be, his guide; and I may as well expect that every man should be of my size and complexion, as that he should reason just as I do. Every man seeks for truth; but God only knows who has found it. It is, therefore, as unjust to persecute, as it is absurd to ridicule people for those several opinions which they cannot help entertaining upon the conviction of their reason. It is the man who tells, or who acts a lie, that is guilty, and not he who honestly and sincerely believes the lie. I really know nothing more criminal, more mean,

* Letters to his son: letters twenty,twenty-one; Sayle,pgs.40,41:

and more ridiculous than lying. It is the production either of malice, cowardice, or vanity: and generally misses of its aim in every one of these views; for lies are always detected sooner or later. If I tell a malicious lie in order to affect any man's fortune or character, I may indeed injure him for some time; but I shall be sure to be the greatest sufferer myself at last; for as soon as ever I am detected (and as detected I most certainly shall be), I am blasted for the infamous attempt; and whatever is said afterward to the disadvantage of that person, however true, passes for calumny. If I lie, or equivocate (for it is the same thing), in order to excuse myself for something that I have said or done, and to avoid the danger and the shame that I apprehend from it, I discover at once my fear as well as my falsehood; and only increase, instead of avoiding, the danger and the shame; I show myself to be the lowest and the meanest of mankind, and am sure to be always treated as such. Fear, instead of avoiding, invites danger; for concealed cowards will insult known ones. If one has had the misfortune to be in the wrong, there is something noble in frankly owning it; it is the only way of atoning for it, and the only way of being forgiven. Equivocating, evading, shuffling, in order to remove a present danger or inconveniency, is something so mean, and betrays so much fear, that whoever practices them always deserves to be, and often will be kicked. There is another sort of lies, inoffensive enough in themselves, but wonderfully ridiculous; I mean those lies which a mistaken vanity suggests, that defeat the very end for which they are calculated, and terminate in the humiliation and confusion of their author, who is sure to be detected. These are chiefly narrative and historical lies, all intended to do infinite honor to their author. He is always the hero of his own romances; he has been in dangers from which nobody but himself ever escaped; he has seen with his own eyes whatever other people have heard or read of: he has had more 'bonnes fortunes' than ever he knew women; and has ridden more miles post in one day, than ever courtier went in two. He is soon discovered, and as soon becomes the object of universal contempt and ridicule. Remember then, as long as you live, that nothing but strict truth can carry you through the world, with either your conscience or your honor unwounded. It is not

only your duty, but your interest; as a proof of which you may always observe, that the greatest fools are the greatest liars. For my own part, I judge of every man's truth by his degree of understanding." *2

Chesterfield's advice to his son in matters of social conduct tells us much about the elder Stanhope's modesty, directness, and tact. His idea of good company is interesting. Those who are one's superiors or equals and who have the respect of society for birth or achievement are fit companions, reasoning which he convinces us is to be embraced intuitively by all men of practical knowledge. "Good company is not essentially fashionable but never is low: it is not restricted to men of learning though it esteems ans is esteemed by them; nor to the society of wits which should be enjoyed but not admired."*1 It is sound advice, for we are judged by the company we keep. The best company is complimented by character and learning and still further by wisdom. Above all the elder Stanhope insists on good-breeding: for without it "the Scholar is a Pedant; the Philosopher a Cynic; and the Soldier a Brute."*3

A wise guide is the best friend to one's experience. That the blind was not leading the blind is apparent from the thoroughness with which the Earl undertook to outline for his son definite rules of drawing-room conduct. If we were to recall Hogarth's panorama of eighteenth century society we should perhaps find it difficult to introduce to that era

*1Letters to his son: letter twenty-nine; Johnson, pg. 98:
*2 Letters to his son: letter XIV; Leigh, pg. 20:
*3Letters to his son: letter thirteen; Sayle, pg. 28:

a man skilled in the art of pleasing with the expectation of having him well received.

The art of pleasing, well illustrated by Chesterfield, involves showing indulgence to the pleasures, vanities, and weaknesses of others. He sets up for his son as a goal not being first in a company, which is a selfish and common aspiration, but rather being a respected member of a company and able to acquire gracefully its tone. "Company is a Republic too jealous of its liberties to suffer a dictator (Johnson) even for a quarter of an hour."*1 And later he says, "There are some few who really govern; but then it is by seeming to disclaim, instead of attempting to usurp the power." The following is a precis of his precepts for ideal conduct.*2 Avoid story telling with respect to the conditions and variances of time, place, and company together with the danger of tediousness, repetition, and inappropriateness; avoid egoism as much for privacy's sake as for modest bearing: avoid exhibitionism in dress or talents; let your talents be discovered: investigate men for their excellences but know their weaknesses and flatter them for the latter;"do justice to the one and more than justice to the other"; do not be an abject flatterer but a complaisant and indulgent attendant to "innocent weaknesses and ridiculous vanities" especially by catering to tastes and antipathies: learn something from every companion; "facts from men and manners from women."

*1 Letters to his son: letter twenty-seven; Sayle, pg.56:
*2 " " " " letter fourteen; Sayle, pg. 29:

"The world must be your grammar," is his basic precept to his son. He meant the youth to have the rudiments of the politician, a good background in ancient and modern history and languages but not the intense devotion to study of a professor of Greek. Chesterfield would be the last person to suggest the division of interest, attention, and effort of the man who does everything a little but nothing well. He recognized that it is necessary for a man of the world and rather especially for one engaged in the diplomatic service to have the unrestricted and combined versatility of both learning and experience. While this versatility is not essential to most professions it is sadly lacking to most personalities; Chesterfield knew it as a part of magnanimity together with thoroughness, patience, sagacity, tolerance, and sincerity, and serenity. He also knew the danger of excess even of virtue, that a mere increase of generosity may lead to profusion, economy to avarice, courage to rashness, and caution to timidity. He knew the importance of judgment, in a world where vice is so often disguised as virtue, in directing learning to truth and away from the errors of pride and pedantry. "Absurd pedants think of the Ancients as more than men, the Moderns as something less. Speak of the Moderns without contempt and of the Ancients without pedantry."*

In his doctrine, "to please is almost to prevail", he is at times almost but never quite a Polonius. The merit

* Letters to his son: letter thirty; Sayle, pg. 62:

won by learning can win esteem, but Chesterfield would counter that evidence by pointing out that "grace wins love." He would observe what pleases others; to him a personable "je ne sais quoi" is as appealing as the "mauvais honte" is abhorrent. "Do not laugh," he cautions.

> " Do not laugh: smile as if the mind is pleased and the countenance cheered by true wit or sense not mirth. Talk often, never long: avoid stories, narrative, and discussion of self: never deny or boast your virtues or vices; they will be discovered: gracefully accept the tone of the company you are in: always be frank: avoid scandal-mongering, illiberal mimicry, profanity, and rude laughter: chameleonlike adapt yourself to society in manners not morals: flaater all of this by cultivating the graces." *1

In the same vein he insists that cultivation of the graces avoids both the sluggish and the frivolous habits of the mind.

The advice to his son is rarely more diverting than in Chesterfield's characterization of women. "They have the pettiness of children whom a man of sense plays with, humors, but never trusts though he seems to." *2 He pronounces them most flattered on their least possessed virtue, their intelligence. An obviously beautiful woman is flattered most on her intellect; a plain woman by allusion to her beauty. And all are swayed by vanity and love.

We have noticed Chesterfield's attention to the exclusive aspects of each company which he would have the

*1 Letters to his son; letter thirty; Johnson, pg. 102:

*2 " " " letter twenty-six; Johnson, pg. 90:

gentleman master by good humor, breeding, and urbanity. Yet he insists on individuality and loyalty to one's own opinion if it has been reasonably formed; having recognized various personalities as models or types worthy of association he honorably accepts them without the necessity of imitation. It should be noted also that he encourages charm not for its own sake but because it will "elevate a minor person to seeming greatness and nearly deify a man of parts;"*1 he cultivates dress not in vanity but as a social asset; he accepts courtly dissimulation not from weakness but as a wise defense against ambition and avarice ("not to offend is better than to flatter");*2 he stresses bearing and finesse not only as necessary counteractives of an imperfect human nature but as outward yet undeniable evidences of education. "Good manners like morals are the cement and security of society ... mutual complaisances are a part of the social compact of civilized people, are as pleasurable as good deeds."*3 And also he repeats, "Good-breeding adorns merit and covers the want of it." This last is essentially Chesterfield's reason for the emphasis of good-breeding which he considered a natural attribute of man and one which requires for its development the use of common sense applied to the environment of the individual. He gives it a local character: "if you would have strength from others they must receive advantage from you."

*1 Letters to his son: letter thirty-two; Johnson, pg. 115:
*2 " " letter thirty-six; Johnson, pg. 131:
*3 " " letter thirty-nine; Johnson, pg. 143:

And he also makes it essential; "it wins favor, attracts attention to your virtues, masks the lack of them. Its very superficiality wins the respect of errant human nature."*

He wrote to his son at the academy at Turin in December of 1749 and reiterated his belief that understanding is the dupe of passion, a belief enforced by his success as a speaker in the House of Lords where he learned to charm the ear and capture the judgment. He quotes Lord Clarendon, the historian's character of John Hampden, that "he had a head to contrive, a tongue to persuade, and a hand to execute any mischief." Chesterfield, with the substitution of the word good, instead of mischief, selects this character as a model for his son.

From London, the letter of January 8, 1750 is illuminating as to the nature of the character-building advice which the Earl proffered to his son. "There is nothing so delicate as your moral character." He goes on:

> " There is nothing so delicate as your moral character. Your moral character must be not only pure, but like Caesar's wife, unsuspected. The least blemish upon it is fatal ... Should you be suspected of injustice, malignity, perfidy, lying etc., all the parts and knowledge in the world will never procure you esteem, friendship, or respect. A strange concurrence of circumstances has sometimes raised very bad men to high stations, but they have been raised like criminals to a pillory, where their persons and their crimes, by being more conspicuous, are only the more known, the more detested, and the more pelted and insulted ... Colonel Chartres, whom you have certainly heard of (who was, I believe, the most notorious blasted rascal in the world, and who had, by all sorts of

* Letters to his son; letter forty; Johnson, pg. 150:

crimes, amassed immense wealth), was so sensible of the disadvantage of a bad character, that I heard him once say, in his impudent, profligate manner, that though he would not give one farthing for virtue, he would give ten thousand pounds for a character; because he could get a hundred pounds by it; whereas, he was so blasted, that he had no longer an opportunity of cheating people. Is it possible, then, that an honest man can neglect what a wise rogue would purchase so dear?" *

By precept and example but without pharisaical pretense, he advocates in the same letter the decency and utility of the appearance of religion.

" When I say the appearances of Religion, I do not mean that you should talk or act like a missionary or an enthusiast, nor that you should take up a controversial cudgel against whoever attacks the sect you are of; this would be both useless and unbecoming your age; but I mean that you should by no means appear to approve, encourage, or applaud those libertine notions, which strike at religions equally, and which are the poor threadbare topics of half-wits and minute little philosophers. Even those who are silly enough to laugh at their jokes are still wise enough to distrust and detest their characters; for putting moral virtues at the highest, and religion at the lowest, religion must still be allowed to be a collateral security, at least, to virtue, and every prudent man will sooner trust to two securities than to one. Whenever, therefore, you happen to be in company with those pretended Esprits forts, or with thoughtless libertines, who laugh at all religion to show their wit, or disclaim it, to complete their riot, let no look or word of yours intimate the least approbation; on the contrary, let a silent gravity express your dislike: but enter not into the subject and decline such unprofitable and indecent controversies. Depend upon this truth, that every man is the worse looked upon, and the less trusted for being thought to have no religion; in spite of all the pompous and specious epithets he may assume, of Esprit fort, free-thinker, or moral philosopher; and a wise atheist (if such a thing there is) would, for his own interest and character in this world,

* Letters to his son; Leigh, letter C, pg. 275:

> pretend to some religion... Do not debate nor enter into serious argument upon a subject so much below it: but content yourself with telling these APOSTLES that you know they are not serious; that you have a much better opinion of them than they would have you have; and that, you are very sure, they would not practice the doctrine they preach. But put your private mark upon them, and shun them forever afterward." *1

These are modest criticisms by a man who accepted the world as a great court requiring excellences in speech, writing, and character. But he realized that the morality of the court and the world was compromised by selfishness, and that cunning was masked by politics, indecency by politeness, falsehood by boldness. "A court air consists in quitting a real for a borrowed greatness. The latter pleases the courtier more." *2

In a letter to his son at Paris in 1750 Chesterfield expresses clearly to the younger Stanhope the purpose of his education:

> " You are in truth but now going to the great and important school, the world; to which Westminster and Leipzig were only the little preparatory schools, as Mary-le-bone, Windsor, etc., are to them. What you have already acquired will only place you in the second form of this new school instead of the first. But if you intend, as I suppose you do, to get into the shell, you have very different things to learn from Latin and Greek: and which require much more sagacity and attention than those two dead languages; the language of pure and simple nature; the language of nature variously modified and corrupted by passions, prejudices, and habits; the language of simulation and dissimulation; very hard, but very necessary to decipher. Homer has not half

*1 Letters to his son: Leigh; letter C, pg. 275:
*2 " " " " Leigh; letter CXVI, pg. 325:

so many, nor so difficult dialects, as the great book of the school you are now going to. Observe, therefore, progressively, and with the greatest attention, what the scholars, the best scholars, in the form immediately above you do, and so on, until you get into the shell yourself." *1

Manners do not compensate for ill conduct or for want of morality. Six months later Chesterfield writes, again from London to Paris, the folowing justification of his attention to the externals of his son's grooming.

" I should not so often repeat nor so long dwell upon such trifles with anybody that had less solid and valuable knowledge than you have. Frivolous people attend to those things par preference; they know nothing else; my fear with you is that from knowing better things you should despise these too much and think them less than they are." *2

Manners do not compensate for ill conduct; nor do they excuse faulty character. Chesterfield had seen famed Lord Baltimore please and prosper by his manner. On the other hand he had seen Johnson disgrace his worthier self for want of manner. He writes:

" There is a man, whose moral character, deep learning, and superior parts, I acknowledge, admire, and respect; but whom it is so impossible for me to love, that I am almost in a fever whenever I am in his company. His figure (without being deformed) seems made to disgrace or ridicule the common structure of the human body. His legs and arms are never in the position which, according to the situation of his body, they ought to be in, but constantly employed in committing acts of hostility upon the Graces. He throws anywhere but down his throat whatever he means to drink, and only mangles what he means to carve. Inattentive to all the regards of social life,

*1 Letters to his son: Leigh, pg. 325:
*2 Letters to his son: Leigh; pg. 367:

> he mistimes or misplaces everything. He disputes with heat, and indiscriminately, mindless of the rank, character, and situation of those with whom he disputes; absolutely ignorant of the several gradations of familiarity or respect, he is exactly the same to his superiors, his equals, and his inferiors; and therefore, by a necessary consequence, absurd to two of the three. Is it possible to love such a man? No. The utmost I can do for him, is to consider him as a respectable Hottentot." *1

The motto which he selected as an inspiration to his son is significant, further, of the real emphasis of his educational letters. Suaviter in modo; fortiter in re: gentleness of manner; firmness of mind.

> " I would have you be what I know nobody is, perfect ... or as near perfection as possible. Never were so much pains taken for anybody's education as for yours; and never had anybody those opportunities of knowledge and improvement which you have had and still have. I hope, I wish, I doubt, and I fear alternately. This only I am sure of -- that you will prove either the greatest pain or the greatest pleasure."*2

Lord Chesterfield's sincerity, spending itself on manners more than on morals may not have appeared too convincing or worthwhile to the puritan: but manners, especially if not confused with mere etiquette, denote character; his candor may have seemed presumptuous and impertinent to the conservative; his wit, good humored though penetrating, must have amused but also ridiculed alike the prude, the pedant, and the beau. At his occasional worst Chesterfield seems, on the surface, at least, to have the scruple of a social butterfly. "The solid and ornamental are undoubtedly best;

*1 Letters to his son: Feb. 28, 1751; Leigh, pg. 383:
*2 Leigh 386:

but were I reduced to make an option, I should without hesitation choose the latter."* However, this is not his usual tone, and in these remarks one suspects him to be carried away by the force of a momentary passion. At his more frequent best he has the perspective and sincere though polished grace of a man of the world. His suggestions for restraint and avoidance of imposture are sincere but lightly casual, their seriousness heightened by the acknowledged necessity of giving advice to an average immature young man and the purpose of encouraging ethical character in a zestful, interesting, but convincing and sensible manner.

The letters to his son are fundamentally Chesterfield's best and most important as well as his most illuminating work. The other letters which he has written are for the most part chatty, clever, observant tete-a-tete but highly contemporary in interest and emphasis. Criticism of the letters is often involved and superfluous; but we may sum it up in two distinct classifications, the contemporary and the modern. Cowper in the Progress of Error contributes the following contemporary criticism of Chesterfield's letters.

> " Thou polished and high finished foe to truth
> Grey-beard corrupter of our list'ning youth,
> To purge and skim away the filth of vice,
> That so refin'd, it might the more entice,
> Then pour it on the morals of thy son,
> To taint his heart, was worthy of thine own!
> Now, while the poison all high life invades,
> Write, if thou canst, one letter from the Shades."

* Letters to his son: February 11, 1751; Leigh, pg. 379:

Exemplary of more modern criticism is the following quotation by Roger Coxon* from Collins' Essays and Studies.*2

> " The charm of Chesterfield lies in his sincerity and truthfulness, in his refined good sense, in his exquisite perception of the becoming, finding expression in seriousness most happily tempered by gaity. Of no man could it be more truly said that he had cleared his mind of Cant. A writer more absolutely devoid of pretentiousness or affectation cannot be found. Of moral and intellectual frippery he has nothing. Sophistry and paradox are his abhorrence. All he has written bears, indeed, the reflection of a character which is of all characters perhaps the rarest --- ' the character of one'--- it was what Voltaire said of him -- ' who had never been in any way either a charlatan or a dupe of charlatans! He is one of the very few writers who never wear a mask, and in whose accent no falsetto note can ever be detected. In his fearless intellectual honesty he reminds us of Swift, in his pellucid moral candor he reminds us of Montaigne. To contemplate life, not as it presents itself under the glamour or the gloom of illusion and prejudice, as it presents itself to the enthusiast or the cynic, but as it really is; to regard ignorance as misfortune and vice as evil, but the false assumption of wisdom and virtue as something far worse; to be or to strive to be what pride would have us seem, and to live worthily within the limits severally prescribed by nature and fortune --- all this will the study of Chesterfield's philosophy tend to impress on us."

Quite a different estimate, I dare say, of Chesterfield's character and position than that bearish appraisal by Johnson and one more fitting the actual character of Philip Stanhope, fourth Earl of Chesterfield.

* Chesterfield: pg. 9:
*2 pp. 256,257:

VI A General View of Chesterfield's Contemporaries:

For an increased perspective of Chesterfield's stature a brief consideration of other outstanding personalities will provide additional background.

Horace Walpole is distinguished for two accidents, his family and his letters. In the former he enjoyed political prestige, social advantage, and economic security and had none of the prepossession toward fame or money so distracting to contemporary literary minds; in the latter, his work, he achieved a position as a significant literary figure whose life (1717-1797) covers almost the whole of the eighteenth century. In his personal life Walpole, unlike his illustrious father, was quiet, subdued, and not aggressive, his retiring nature possibly accentuated by the persistent aura of scandal and controversy surrounding family relationships and affairs which had a profound effect on the sensitive Horace.

His early associations with Gray, West, and Ashton and later with George Selwyn and Harry Conway stimulated his intellectual experience and encouraged him in pursuing a variety of interests. It is a far cry, however, from the young Horace, the sensitive, self-conscious student, to the mature Walpole, the cynical, witty, gossipy court fop. From his letters he was interested chiefly in court life and affairs, fashion, and gentlemanly pursuits but managed to avoid excess of vice as well as of virtue. He was noted in his later years as an antiquarian of some stature and the leader of the Gothic revival which culminated in the elaboration of the house at

Strawberry Hill, near Twickenham, as an imitation in miniature of a medieval castle. The latter was ridiculed by many critics as a curio shop maintained by a sentimental fool whose petty "treasures are baubles", according to Macaulay.

Walpole's letters are well finished but in their smoothness and polish have more artificiality than originality. The best that may be said for them is that they are never garrulous or tedious and have a lightness of touch; the worst, that their criticism is disreputable, their humor artificial, their subject matter trivial. Just as Chesterfield reflects the manners of the age so Walpole preserves the whims and frivolities. His lightness is occasionally relieved by his becoming more serious. But like that of Chesterfield and more justifiably his personality is often consumed in triviality; his character becomes imperceptible in the maze of petty gossip and intimate anecdote. One's opinion of him varies from letter to letter according to the content as to whether Walpole is a raconteur or a busybody, a Lucius Beebe or a Winchell. But he never appears as a mere parasite of society thriving on its flaws and thus disassociates himself from the company of modern pseudo-socialites.

At times he fluctuates between puerility and blasé worldliness. His humor is not mirthful or spontaneous. It is mild, dry, intellectual but nevertheless a good humor without bitterness. Except upon an occasion it is not studied and depends on the incongruity of event, originality of conception,

or contrast of arrangement rather than vulgar absurdity. It is, furthermore, a light, refined, but personal and highly contemporary humor that thrives on anecdote and dwells momentarily on the satirical. He likes nothing so well as sticking pins in social balloons, and yet his keen perception is not jaded by bitterness. At the prospect of posterity tendering an undue share of reverence to his corrupt generation he expects his ghost will "shake its ears" --- a concept rather brightened by his apprehension of the irony of reputation and its basis. In the more serious and less gossipy letters his style is not so conversational or descriptive, having been the latter nearly to a categorical fault in many intimate notes from out-of-the-way places. But it retains an air of diversification, and the very clever use of digression serves to heighten effectively both variety and interest. Here too, he reflects a nature that is at once appreciative and impersonal enough to be justly critical without pettiness, wherein he enjoyed an advantage over Chesterfield. He can be objective and at the same time self-amused, self-satisfied, and self-complaisant as in his devotion to the baubles of Strawberry Hill as the evangelist of Gothicism.

His is not a scholarly intelligence, apparently, for the commentaries on a friend's painting and on music show not a deep sense of criticism, however spontaneous and sensual. He is not a true observer or authoritative critic or analyst of the arts and obviously accepts or rejects on the basis of

personal pre-conceived opinion as to what art should be. His criticism of opera, for example, is significant not so much for its worthy commentary as for the entertainment value o of its witty remarks. Walpole is more the connoisseur of social events than of artistic performance, more the caricaturist of the elite than a critic of coloraturas. His taste is essentially superficial; his judgment at times erratic and inconsistent. That he is influenced by contemporary ideas regarding nature is amusingly revealed in his naïve observation as to the preciseness of a rainbow arched above the house and parterre. But this is fully amended by his cleverness, wit, and aptness of expression. His faults, indolence and triviality, become features of his grace as a letter writer, for they are, in fact, attributes of the type.

His criticisms of society, literature, and politics are never penetrating but are often particularized so as to appear so. At least he avoids generality in the process; and in this respect he is a comparative virtuoso. As his sincerity conceals his superficiality, his savoir faire disguises his naïveté and his prophesy minimizes his pathos.

In The World he indicates that he knows what manners really are --- a means of gracious living. Manners are not to be defined, he says, in a relative way or to be defined by emphasis, which he indicates is the point of separation between French and English illustrations of the concept of manners. He is thoroughly conservative but with neither the

conceit of Anglophilism nor the placid satisfaction of studied humor. His later years, surprisingly enough, find him free of garrulity. Nor is he tedious but still more concerned with pleasure than with utility. Nevertheless, he seems to benefit from a new and more conscientious, serious-minded approach to his letters not unlike that of Mme. de Sevigné, whose earlier French letters are so valuable to the chronicler. Still it must be admitted that his seriousness is at times broad, comprehensive, and thin-spread. He seems to know something about everything but not the reverse. And this, of course, implies outstanding intelligence but also the want of scholarship. Though he is not always agreeable, commendable, or admirable he must be acknowledged as fascinating --- with perhaps little more of the truth than the reflection of it, perhaps more shadow than substance in his nature; but at the same time making the most and best of society observed, as someone aptly phrased, through a goldfish bowl --- with mild malice and some distortion.

The letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu extend over a period of approximately fifty years and are concerned with her travels through the East and her residence in England and Italy. They are framed in a background of marital disillusionment, personal disappointment, and family controversy and scandal. Consequently, the evenness of their tone, their sustained optimism, steady grace, and pleasantness of disposition are unusual. The letters are charming, smooth, stimulating but

only occasionally brilliant or absorbing as her descriptive letters of a harem in Turkey, a palace in Constantinople, and the practice of small-pox inoculation (engrafting) which, incidentally, she sought to introduce into England. In contrast to Walpole's the letters are devoted more to description than to personality. They are decidedly delicate by comparison but not over subtle. They reveal a scholarship profound by comparison, however. She is at all times authoritative in the mastery and expert in the handling of her material with a great deal of natural sentiment which does not degenerate into feminine setimentality, and without an obvious enthusiasm she shows a good measure of spontaneity. But if all her observations, however naïve, are meant to be complimentary (as one has reason to believe) then she is without judgment; if her commentaries are meant to delineate society with a dash of irony (as some think) she lacks imagination and selective power. Or else her taste is in her mouth, and her cynicism is lukewarm. She is often quite convincing as a conversationalist and is as meticulous in description as she is petty in gossip. And none the less charming for it.

Perhaps the modern student, reading her letters for pleasure's sake, finds them a bit utilitarian and practical in treatment, or if for their educational value, finds them perhaps in need of a shot in the arm to relieve their literary stuffiness and consciousness of scholarship, scansion, and stanzas. Lady Mary's personal letters from Constantinople to

the Countess of Mar, her sister, are highly effective, well drawn, and artless --- this last quality being a welcome relief in the more personal cooespondence and one conspicuous by its absence from the formal or literary letters. In the latter there is a suggestion that Lady Mary was at least conscious if not solicitous of their value to publication.

Her Turkish Letters, notably, are suitable for framing. The correspondence with Pope is intellectual, serious, but contains, elaborate and convenient compliments in super-abundance and an assumed deference to the poet not to be taken too seriously nor at the same time to be interpreted as sheer mockery of which there appears but a slight suggestion. And that, I think, is in the use of vocabulary rather than in the trend of thought. The two are often separate. She is a different person in these letters --- witty, clever, facile and yet showing a considerable self-control and lack of sentiment or feeling. There is a further development in the letters of an authoritaive literary criticism which illustrates the extensiveness of her informal scholarship.

She was probably influenced by the French, especially Mme. de Sevigné, whom she admired and may have accepted as a model in the development of the letter, particularly as an instrument of personal and heart-felt expression, of the pleasures of friendship, and a means akin to conversation in deriving the best satisfactions of life. Her letters are especially effective inasmuch as they lack the spectacular but

for variety depend upon their unique subject matter and the thoroughness of treatment necessary to keep their information and content apart from the trite and commonplace of the amateur. She never descends to buffoonery, but can be sarcastically witty, clear, easy, and unaffected with a cleverness that is not studied, unobtrusive. Though her seriousness and scholarship may sometimes create the opposite effect, seemingly at least, her lightness counteracts an occasional excess of polish. She has exceptionable descriptive powers and a flair for the accurate transcription of memorable phrases, experiences, and events. Basically, her style is conversational, graceful, easy; she credits the reader with having intelligence, the power of apprehension, and consequently avoids being tiresome. She sustains a confident, well-informed but not a supercilious, omniscient attitude and manner. Her letters are valuable for their brilliant treatment, perception, and graceful acceptance of life's realities. Her intellectual duels, however, detract from more than they add to her prestige. For Lady Mary's subtle amusement was slight protection against the vitriolic invective of Pope. But even here she is distinguished for her self-control, flourish, freedom from petty animosity, and unrivalled finish.

In his fascinating descriptions of custom and dress, and commentaries on manners and superstition Oliver Goldsmith tries to be cleverly original but rather succeeds in being artificially objective. His noteworthy letters are in the form of

periodical letters or rather periodical essays popularly appearing as epistles. They were presented as Chinese Letters and occupy two volumes of the Citizen of the World. His style is original and contributes variety to otherwise precise business letters and stilted, balanced but formal epistles. The latter are sometimes incongruously informal and friendly, those in which his good nature penetrates formality but which intend to be characteristic of the Oriental and succeed in portraying to a degree his succinct candor. In some respects the Oriental manner is arty and obvious and a bit Continental in imagination, humour, and naïveté. Elsewhere he is not the satirical destructive but a constructive critic. Not that he refrains from being candid; nevertheless, he is decidedly sympathetic toward the naïve, foolish, and enthusiastic followers of custom, pretenders to court favor, and religious evangelists.

Samuel Richardson is more the professional writer of the familiar letter. These are occupied with precise writing, polished style, correct form and apt thought. Although his writings are full of forceful activity and intimate details of life they are nevertheless affacted, and save for differences of sentance lengths are too obviously the work of the same person although they are meant to be exemplary, individualistic, and convincing. They rarely convince us or let us forget that they are facsimiles.

More intimate and revealing are the letters of Frances Burney (Mme. D'Arblay), outstanding diarist of the eighteenth century whose shrewd insight qualifies her to provide us with some of the best characterizations of great and famous men. These sketches are admirably relieved with an easiness and fluidity so natural and highly descriptive as to convince the reader that he is witnessing actual scenes from life. Their best grace is that they have a keen observation exclusive in tone which captures an aspect of the subject's nature unobserved by less canny students of nature than she. This is especially applicable to her descriptive writings concerning Dr. Johnson's activities where a tone even more subtle, natural, milder than Boswell's succeeds in portraying the man in gentler fashion.

The minor writers succeed in no small measure in making the past live in the present through their letters. This is an accomplishment denied to many greater literary figures --- too objective, impersonal, self-concerned, or unsociable for intimate conversational patois. Chesterfield, Walpole, and Lady Mary compensate for this inconsistency of Dryden and Pope, whose epistolary omissions and inadequacies are excused by their comprehensiveness in other fields. There is only a suggestion and not a well sustained one among the neo-classic writers of anything romantic or foolish. It amounts not to an acceptance of sentiment and feeling so much as a recognition that formal principles, however indispensable,

are of themselves inadequate. It would be merely begging the question to attach a purely romantic significance to whatever is less rigorous and more worldly than the classical. The letter writers are students more of society than of learning and their concern is to diversify and delight and occasionally, as we have observed in Chesterfield, to teach. Rarely, however, are they over-sentimental or relaxed in their analysis and criticism of life.

ABSTRACT OF THESIS:

A decendant of a royalist family and by inheritance closely associated with court life and preference, Philip Dormer Stanhope was in his day recognized as of eminent accomplishment in an era of diplomatists and courtier, orators and men of letters. It is as a letter writer and personality of the eighteenth century that this brilliant orator, spectacular beau, and gifted politician penetrates to posterity. His interest, judging from his letters, sustained itself in the further knowledge throughout life of law and principles of government. During his travels abroad he continued to devote his time to study and oratory. As a result both of his studies and of his natural genius young Chesterfield became preëminent as a speaker. As a political figure his chief merit was undoubtedly his honor which he never betrayed by allowing himself to be prevailed upon or bought over on any issue, an exclusive virtue. His chief inspiration in his youth was the knowledge that he was an aristocrat in an intellectual as well as a social sphere. The death of his father in 1726 entered him into the Upper House. But political and court difficulties together with the dissastisfaction of inactivity prevailed upon him to accept the Embassy at the Hague. His constant opposition to Walpole and the Crown lost him favor at court and political advantage. He would bow to no one in matters of political conscience, and so his career was a fluctuating one in which his successes were momentary and not permanent.

The miscarriages and bad judgments of his political career are the more incongruous in the light of his Lordship's avowed protestation of the necessity of bending the will to that of one's potential benefactors. If he had been more inclined toward action, more concerned with acquiring power, and more clever in promulgating his personal designs he might have become a great political figure. In view of Chesterfield's threatened litigation over the property bequeathed to his wife by George I, his opposition to Walpole, incitement of the Prince of Wales against his royal father, and slander against the King, the royal personage could not brook further the interference certain to come of a domestic appointment. The King consented to award him the Viceroyalty of Ireland. He acquitted his duties well and with a special regard to the impartial administration of justice, and the Irish people respected him.

Chesterfield throughout his career had seen more of the rottenness and artificiality of life than of the nobler manifestations. Yet through it all he performed his duty and willingly served the interests of his country. In a period in which every man had his price Lord Chesterfield was able to sustain his ethical honor.

Much of his time was devoted to correspondence with his son; the boy was healthy, proficient in his studies and amiable enough but wanted the grace and presence and worldly knowledge of human nature with which his father longed to

equip him. Chesterfield's educational precepts were designed for the benefit of an individual preparing for a particular profession and not intended as a manual for general use. The presumption by Dr. Johnson and others as to the universal purpose and nature of the letters is erroneous. He fell short of nobility and undoubtedly will ever appear so in the minds of his critics because he is often satisfied with mere appearances without due attention to reality, which constitutes not an allergy bu t a disregard to truth. The morality he preached was in part sophistical and surely not the best that he could understand, but it was for him the most sound to which with a good conscience he could subscribe. He is not altruistic or progressive; he does not reflect character so much as manners. His philosophy, however, has all the perceptive wisdom requisite to a sound set of values but wants enthusiasm, idealism, and spirituality, qualities which he might tolerate except in the over-zealous but which he despised and pitied and could not attain.

Like his predecessors, Montaigne and Locke, he particularly planned for the education of the sons of the gentry and nobility. In its better sense Chesterfield's concept of education is broad, practical, and inclusive both in the scope of its emphasis and the selection of material. It is admirable for its unprecedented and formal recognition of experience as an essential element in education. IN addition to clarifying a practical type of education Chesterfield has

encouraged the tradition of private education.

The younger Stanhope was constantly under the supervision of his father at school and abroad. His father sought to teach him the practical value of compromise. Chesterfield sacrificed only a large degree of sentimentality common to many of us in recognizing the limitations of human nature and the separate levels of human dignity and worthiness.

Chesterfield's letters to his son have a utilitarian purpose. He exhorts his son toward ambition not for the gratification of worldly desires but to acquire a reputation for having the attributes of a "Man of sense and honor." Yet it is likely that his son frequently misinterpreted his advice. "The world must be your grammar," is his basic precept to his son. He knew the importance of judgment, in a world where vice is so often disguised as virtue, in directing learning to truth and away from the errors of pride and pedantry. The motto which he selected as an inspiration to his son is significant, further, of the real emphasis of his educational letters. Suaviter in modo; fortiter in re; gentleness of manner; firmness of mind. The letters to his son are fundamentally Chesterfield's best and most important as well as his most illuminating work.

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